

Merritt Parkway, Riversville Road (East Branch) Bridge  
Spanning Riversville Road and the east branch of the  
Byram River at the 1.8 mile mark on the Merritt  
Parkway  
Greenwich  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-65

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#### PHOTOGRAPHS

#### WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 87127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

## **HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**

### **Merritt Parkway, Riversville Road (East Branch) Bridge**

HAER No. CT-65

**Location:** Spanning Riversville Road and the east branch of the Byram River at the 1.8 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Greenwich, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.611310.4546160  
Quad: Glenville, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1935

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** Lee Construction Company  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Riversville Road

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In July 1640, Daniel Patrick and Robert Feake, as agents of the New Haven Colony, purchased all lands between the Assmick and Potommuck brooks from local Indians. To protect their settlement Patrick and Feake signed allegiance to the Dutch at New Amsterdam, in 1642. Two years later, the Dutch raised a 130-man army and defeated the Petuquapean Indians at the site of the present village of Cos Cob in Greenwich.<sup>1</sup>

In 1650, a treaty was signed that defined the boundary line between Connecticut and New Amsterdam, removing Greenwich from Dutch control. Six years later, Greenwich again came under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony and started to prosper. In the next century, farmers settled throughout the almost fifty square miles of Greenwich. By 1756, there were ten districts in the town: Greenwich, Old Town, Horseneck, Cos Cob, North Street, Peckslan, Round Hill, Quaker Ridge, Stanwich, and Glenville. Trade with New York City prospered as ports developed at Cos Cob and the mouth of the Mianus River. The shoe-making industry developed at Banksville and Stanwich.<sup>2</sup>

With the arrival of the railroad in 1848, Greenwich commenced to change. The train reduced the time required to get to New York City. The town flourished as more and more New Yorkers traveled to Connecticut, seeking a haven from the noise and pollution of the city. By the 1920s, Greenwich was a well-established commuter suburb.<sup>3</sup>

As farms gave way to residential homes, traffic continued to increase on the Post Road/U.S. Route 1. Local residents soon sought an alternative to the dangerous old highway. When

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<sup>1</sup>"Development of Old Greenwich." Greenwich Press, 17 October 1935, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>William E. Finch, "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town," (Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Finch, 6.

Commissioner Macdonald suggested building an alternative road, Greenwich's residents quickly adhered to the idea. But conflicts developed as it came time to determine a specific route.

Originally eight different plans were put forth. This eventually became a contest between two routes. Macdonald wanted a northern route going through Round Hill, North Street, and Stanwich (this become known as the Greenwich Loop). Local residents, including Highway Superintendent P. L. Minor, wanted a more southerly route through Peckslan. They felt this route would be more convenient, less expensive to build and necessary in the near future. Furthermore, local leaders preferred destroying the lower valued properties along the Peckslan route than disrupting wealthy estates to the north. Macdonald threatened to start construction at the east end of the parkway to gain support for his plan. With this obstacle out of the way, work began at the New York state line on June 1, 1934.<sup>4</sup>

#### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Riversville Road begins in Glenville and proceeds north through the community of Riversville to the New York state line. The east branch of the Byram River also flows under the Riversville Bridge. Originating in New York this river meanders through the Audubon Center of Greenwich before running under the Merritt Parkway and into the Long Island Sound.

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<sup>4</sup>"Macdonald Sees No Road Solution," Greenwich Press, 10 September 1931, p. 1.

"Highway Superintendent Minor Proposes Southern Route," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 1.

"Proposed Routes For the Merritt Highway," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 8.

"Route Goes Through Round Hill, Residents Upset," Greenwich Press, 24 March 1932, p. 1.

"400 Hear Cross and Macdonald Discuss Highway," Greenwich Press, 16 November 1933, p.

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The Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from the New York state line to Round Hill Road in Greenwich (ConnDot project #180-13). While the Riversville Road Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the bridge contract went to the Lee Construction Company of Boston, MA (ConnDot project #180-11).<sup>5</sup> The bridge was under construction from May 24, 1934 to early 1935.<sup>6</sup> The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from the state line to Round Hill Road. This contract was awarded to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT (ConnDot project #180-90).

In 1974, the Riversville Road Bridge required extensive rehabilitation. At this time the deck was replaced. The balustrade was removed and a parapet and curbing were put in its place. Seven inches was removed from the top of each pylon, and all loose and spalling concrete was removed and patched (ConnDot project #56-104). In 1988 portions of the wing walls were rebuilt and the bridge and abutments were patched and sealed (ConnDot project #56-210).<sup>7</sup>

#### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Riversville Road and East Branch Bridge is a double-span composite-beam bridge with a clear roadway of 60' for the Merritt Parkway. At a skew of 36°-52'-42", Riversville Road travels under the bridge with a clear roadway of 45', and the east branch of the Byram River flows under a 48'-wide span. Parallel wing walls, 30' long, form the approaches for the overpass.

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<sup>5</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>6</sup>Riversville Road Bridge, DOT #692; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

<sup>7</sup>Riversville Road Bridge, DOT #692; Bridge Maintenance File.

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Spaced at 5' on center, all thirteen composite beams consist of 36" steel I-sections encased in concrete, maintaining the shape of the steel. Channels bracing adjacent beams are also encased. The beams support a 7-1/2"-thick slab. At the center pier the beams are connected to a steel bearing plate with two anchor bolts. At the abutments the steel beams have slotted holes for the bolts to allow the beam to expand.

The center pier features six arched openings between the two spans. The arches are echoed at the abutment walls as recessed panels. The pier and abutments are supported on thick, reinforced-concrete deep beams and wide footings located 8' to 12' below the road. The construction drawings show a sidewalk cantilevered from the center pier along the river side. The sidewalk is no longer useable, and the iron bridge rail has been removed.

This bridge is simply detailed with the arches already mentioned and recessed panels formed in the concrete of the end beams. The pylons feature rectangular recessed panels with a recessed circle formed at the top of the pylon. The poured-in-place handrail differs slightly from the drawings in that it is a wide parapet with recesses to give the appearance of balusters. The year 1936 is set in the face of one of the abutment walls.<sup>8</sup>

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.

Finch, William E. "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town." Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File.

Greenwich Press. 1931-1935.

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<sup>8</sup>The year carved in the bridge does not correspond to the completion date of the bridge.

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- Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.
- Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.